

40 Years of Phoenix Children's Hospital & Reflecting on Its Impact

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Photo: Phoenix Children's Hospital

"The day I walk in that hospital and I don't get a lump in my throat is the day I know it's time to go." Yet, it's been almost 40 years, and still that day for Steve Schnall has not come. For the Phoenix Children's Hospital Foundation executive, even just walking into the hospital has the power to remind him why he returns: "When I go into that hospital, and I look at those kids, who are just, I mean, some of the treatments are brutal," he says. "And I see their little smiles. The kid with cancer, who has finished their treatment, and they get to ring the bell when their treatment's over. And then only to find out their cancer's come back, it's really tough."

Since opening in September 1983, Phoenix Children's Hospital has become an esteemed cornerstone of Arizona pediatric healthcare. The main campus, along with its East Valley medical center, four pediatric specialty and urgent care centers, 11 community pediatric practices, 20 outpatient clinics and more, has provided care to hundreds of thousands of children. Within the next five years, Phoenix Children's Hospital is projected to have provided care to one in four children living in Arizona. In 2021 alone, over 375,000 outpatient appointments took place and over 89,000 children were cared for in the emergency department. Additionally, more than 216,000 children received care from Phoenix Children's in 2021.

In the beginning, Phoenix Children's Hospital didn't even have its own facility. Originally located within the walls of Good Samaritan Medical Center, now Banner – University Medical Center Phoenix, the hospital had a meager 71 beds, says Schnall. Growing up to 240 beds by 1998, Phoenix Children's Hospital was ready for the next step: to get its own facility.

After purchasing a previous hospital for \$29 million that underwent an additional \$100-million renovation, Phoenix Children's Hospital opened its own campus on 18 acres of land in May 2002 that allowed it to house 300 patients at a time.

Unfortunately, within the first two months, this pristine, gorgeous, dream-of-a-facility quickly dilapidated after the hospital flooded, says Schnall. Only seven days away from running out of money, he says, they held on tight.

But, like the name of our city, Schnall says, "It's the story of how Phoenix rises all the time, and Phoenix Children's Hospital rose again."

The accreditations and statistics are definitely two reasons the hospital has flourished. But beside the numbers, the uplifting and supportive community is what has made all the difference in its almost 40-year tenure.

Eliciting an emotional response, Schnall emphasized the power of events like "Ignite Hope," an annual candlelight walk during the holiday season along Thomas Road.

"They're [the kids] gonna be in the hospital over the holidays, maybe fighting for their lives, family members who are sitting beside a child's bed knowing that this may be their last Christmas, we don't know. We hope and pray many days for a miracle," says Schnall.

As the thousands of participants continue the candlelit walk toward the hospital, the sight they see is enough to bring tears to their eyes. "And then you see the whole hospital lit up and you see kids in their rooms looking out and watching what's going on." Even kids who are lacking the strength to stand up can feel the joy—the event is broadcasted throughout the whole hospital for all to experience. It's the one thing we can all give to others in a time of need: hope.

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